

KANEGASAKI SISTER CITY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

Fiscal Year 2004

Members: Ed Alford, Nancy Bess, Denise Boyd, Florence Boynton, Alex Kent, Byron Koh (Chair), Nancy Hirsh Pagano, Carolyn Platt, Joan Snowdon, Yuko Takahashi

Resigned: Abbie Jenks, Kathy Masalski

Liaisons: Carl Seppala (Select Board) and Barry DelCastilho (Town Manager)

The Kanegasaki Sister City Committee was established by the Select Board following the signing in 1993 of an official agreement between Amherst and Kanegasaki, Iwate, Japan. The agreement formalized a relationship – one of citizen exchanges – that had developed over a period of five years. The KSCC is charged with promoting friendship and on-going relations with Kanegasaki. The relationship is to be accomplished through various special events and ongoing contacts between residents or government bodies of the two communities, and is to be of mutual benefit to them. The Committee works with Town and school officials to organize delegation exchanges of officials, citizens, members of the business community and students.

The Jones Library and Kanegasaki libraries have their own sister city agreement, formally signed in 2003. When Kanegasaki sent over a large gift of books this year, the Jones Library reciprocated. KSCC member Carolyn Platt, who is also a member of the library staff, coordinated the selections. The KSCC contributed \$100 and the Eric Carle Museum gave books to augment the Jones Library gift.

This is the fifteenth year that Kanegasaki Middle School students have visited Amherst. This year, 11 students and three chaperones came. The annual March visit is an opportunity for Japanese students, teachers and administrators to visit our schools and learn about our community. The chaperones this year were the Director of the Lifelong Learning Center, Ms. Kazuko Matsumoto; a science teacher and 8th grade head teacher, Mr. Youichi Oodaira; and a translator, Ms. Shoko Nozato. The KSCC assisted with hosting the chaperones and making the students feel welcome.

Twelve Amherst students and two teacher chaperones went to Kanegasaki, Tokyo, Kyoto and Hiroshima this April. Our student delegations have been able to go to Japan each spring since 1998. This is the sixth and final year that the Freeman Foundation has awarded a \$20,000 grant to the Amherst School Department to help with expenses related to this trip. The funding (considered “seed” money) made the trip feasible for a diverse group of Amherst students to represent our community. With an approximate cost of \$2,000 per person, this money subsidized \$1,300 per student and the cost of the two chaperones. Two students, who would not have been able to afford the trip, received a larger subsidy, enabling them to participate. The Kanegasaki Sister City Committee remains involved and committed to helping the School Department continue the two exchanges annually. We are presently looking for grants, community fundraising ideas, and innovative ways to cut additional expenses related to the April trip. Finding money and support for cultural exchanges is a big challenge in this time of deficits and program reductions, particularly in the schools.

In an effort to encourage community involvement and raise funds at the same time, the KSCC sent out a letter from a newly developed database of friends of Kanegasaki, comprised of names of families whose children either went to or hosted visitors from Japan, and others in the community who have shown some sort of interest in the Sister City relationship. The results of

the letter were encouraging: \$780 was raised, twelve families agreed to host visitors, eight families volunteered to be “Friends of Kanegasaki, two people offered to help write grants, and two people expressed interest in joining the Committee. While challenges lie ahead, the KSCC remains committed to its important mission of promoting friendship and understanding through our Sister-City relationship with Kanegasaki.

Respectfully submitted by Nancy Hirsh Pagano, Secretary